

STATINTL

Mission to Moscow—Has Goods, Does Travel

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When Romaine Fielding, salesman, faces east, he envisions the magnitude of the Soviet Union, a nation with one-sixth of the world's land, 226 million of its people, and almost nothing in the way of consumer goods.

A gregarious Californian who rarely stops talking in either American or Russian, Mr. Fielding has been doing business with Russia since 1958, and enjoying every minute of it.

Even the occasional intrusion of the secret police does not dampen his enthusiasm. "When I walk into my hotel room in Russia, I yell 'One, two, three, testing,' " he said recently.

He never found out if his rooms were bugged or not, but Mr. Fielding does not really care. All he is doing is selling products. Besides, he always likes someone to listen when he talks.

His persuasiveness and ability to get along with Russian businessmen and government officials have brought him \$8 million in business in the last seven years.

The sales have mainly been in laundry and dry-cleaning equipment, which has moved friends to describe him as the man most responsible for a cleaner Russia.

CLEANING UP

The machinery he has sold is used in some 25 installations in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev and reportedly constitutes 90 per cent of modern laundering and dry cleaning equipment purchased by the Soviet Union from Western nations.

This year the American supersalesman is extending his energies into other U. S. products. He will conduct a 13-day exhibit next week that will demonstrate shoe repair



Romaine Fielding

and manufacturing equipment in Sokolniki Park, Moscow.

In September, he will exhibit electrostatic painting equipment made by Ransburg Electro-Coating Corp. at an international chemical industries exhibition in Moscow.

If past experience holds, Muscovites will not be able to pick out Mr. Fielding from any other well-fed, prosperous Russian government official. At 46, the burly, outgoing Californian has acclimated himself to the peculiar role of an American salesman in Russia with self-possessioned ease. Even his wife, whom he married last year, comes from the USSR.

His interest in the Soviet Union goes back to the post-World War II years when he used his GI bill educational rights to study the Russian language. He figured that one day the U. S. would have close relations with the Soviet and he wanted to be prepared.

With a natural facility for languages and a keen brain (he has played 20 games of chess simultaneously in competition), he developed a superb command of the difficult tongue.

While learning the language, he spoke with anyone he could find, not an easy task around the Los Angeles area, but he did locate some White Russian refugees from the Communist revolution.

The son of Romaine Fielding sr., a silent movie star, the future supersalesman was reared in a 'boys' home after his father died. He worked while attending high school, then studied speech and dramatics at Los Angeles City College. During World War II, he served in the Navy and rose to lieutenant commander.

FOUND NICHE

Like many ex-service men, he wandered from job to job, working even as a florist delivery boy and a typist for a mail order candy house. When he started selling laundry machinery, he found his place. He is a born salesman.

In 1948, his natural confidence led him to establish his own firm, Romaine Fielding & Associates. For the next 10 years he prospered in the heyday of laundromats that saw tens of thousands of the coin-operated stores whiten the Southern California landscape.

He nearly lost his first chance to try his persuasiveness with Russians in 1958. He was en route to Moscow, with \$125,000 worth of commercial dry-cleaning and laundry equipment which he intended to display in a trade fair. During a stopover in Finland, he learned the Russians had canceled the fair.

Deflated only momentarily, he literally talked his way to Moscow and obtained permission to hold his own one-man show. His entire stock was purchased by Soviet officials. It was the beginning of a wonderful relationship.

From then on, he concentrated his buoyant energy on

supplying as many of Russia's millions as possible with cleaning equipment.

The role demands special qualities. "Patience, tact, persuasiveness," Mr. Fielding said a week ago before leaving on his 11th trip to Russia, "You can't be an order taker. It's hard for Russians to part with dollars, and you can't take rubles."

The Soviet "businessmen" with whom he deals are really government officials, members of 27 combines that do the buying for the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade. Personal contacts are the key to all deals.

On each trip Mr. Fielding brings Polaroid film to his friend, the Mayor of Moscow. He had given the Mayor the camera and the Russian official presented him with a watch. Mr. Fielding knows Anastas I. Mikoyan and once dealt with a then-little-known politician named Alexei Kossygin, now Premier.

He has never been questioned by the Soviet secret police, although he has sent them invitations to grand openings of his coin-ops on the assumption they would be there anyway. The Central Intelligence Agency has not bothered him, either.

HAGGLERS

One thing he does find tough about the Russians is price. In his first transaction, the Californian made the error of starting with a reasonable offer. Now he opens with a high price and works down.

He finds the Russian people friendly to the United States. He saw tears in Moscow streets when President Kennedy was assassinated.

He likes them, too, but he draws a patriotic line. When his son was about to be born, he flew his wife back to the U. S. so the baby could arrive here.